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ABSTRACT

The California Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) provides a design for developing a method of measuring the identified competencies of local education agencies. It provides information about student placement, progress, and competency attainment in a format meaningful to the student, instructor, and program manager. Steps in setting up an assessment system are: (1) determining educational needs of populations to be served, (2) identifying the skills and competencies that meet these learners' needs, (3) incorporating these skills and competencies into an integrated curriculum, and (4) identifying curriculum materials and instructional strategies. Assessment provides data for making the following decisions about students: program placement, diagnosis of student instructional needs and learning style, monitoring of progress, and certification of student skill and competency attainment. Assessment provides data for making these decisions about programs: program effectiveness, teaching strategy effectiveness, curriculum and instructional validity, resource allocation, and staff development/personal needs. Key elements of CASAS include the CASAS competency list (competency statements within life skills content areas and for computational skills), the curriculum index and matrix (identification of instructional materials and specification of the appropriate program and level of instruction), the item bank (test items), and implementation workshops. (YLB)

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CASAS: DESIGN FOR AN EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

FOR LIFE SKILLS

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California Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) Overview

CASAS provides a design for developing an assessment system that measures the identified competencies of local education agencies, provides information about student placement, progress, and competency attainment in a format that is meaningful to the student, instructor, and the program manager, and is based on scaling procedures that permit agencies to select items that measure identified competencies at appropriate program levels, and also monitoring of group progress across programs and agencies because of the underlying common scaling procedure.

Major Goals

CASAS has been developed to meet five major goals:

1. Provide effective assessment for correct placement of students into programs from beginning through advanced Levels of Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, and vocational programs.

2. Measure student achievement in a competency-based program.

3. Target day-to-day relevant instruction.

4. Certify attainment of competencies for movement of students to higher program levels and local certification programs.

5. Provide materials and procedures that are adaptable to a variety of educational settings and linked to competency-based curriculum goals and instructional programs.

Getting Started

Assessment in competency-based programs must be directly linked to the skills and competencies taught. The skills and competencies taught must relate directly to the educational needs of the adult learners being served. When there is a lack of relationship among what is taught, what is assessed and what students need, the program loses relevance for the students served. The following steps should be followed in setting up an assessment system:

1. Determine the educational needs of the populations served by the program.

2. Identify the skills and competencies that meet the needs of these learners and will enable them to move toward their goals.

3. Incorporate these skills and competencies into an integrated curriculum.

4. Identify the curriculum materials and Instructional strategies.

Designing the Assessment System

Assessment provides data for making sound decisions. Decisions about students need to be made for:

1. Placement into program

   What program, what level, and what instructional plan?

2. Diagnosing student instructional needs and learning style

   Where should learning start?

   How is the student functioning in basic and life skills?

   How does the student best learn?

3. Monitoring Progress

   What competencies has the student already mastered?

   What competencies need to be learned?

Has the student learned what was taught?

Is there a need for additional instruction?

4. Certifying student's skill and competency attainment

Has the student demonstrated mastery of competencies at the level specified?

Is the student ready to move to the next level?

Is the student ready to exit from the program?

Has the student demonstrated the prerequisite skills and competencies needed to enter a new program?

Assessment provides data for making sound decisions about programs based on valid and reliable information. This data is used for:

1. Determining the effectiveness of the instructional program

2. Determining the effectiveness of various teaching strategies

3. Determining curriculum and instructional validity

4. Allocating resources

5. Determining staff development/personal needs

In designing relevant assessment for competency-based programs, it is necessary to determine who needs to know what, and when. Assessment must be presented in a timely and understandable manner. The quality of the data collected is determined by its validity and reliability. The quality of decisions made relates directly to the quality of the data on which it is based.

CASAS Key Elements of an Assessment System

CASAS is based on assessment that is linked directly to identififed competency statements across a continuum of difficulty and is linked to curriculum materials that address the specific competency statements.

1. CASAS Competency List

   This list contains 132 competency statements within life skills content areas of Consumer Economics, Community Resources, Health, Occupational Knowledge, and Government and Law.

An additional 37 statements are included for computational skills. This list has been refined and validated over a four year period by more than 40 CASAS Consortium agencies for inclusion in Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language programs. In addition, entry level competencies have been identified for four vocational programs including Machine Shop, Auto Mechanics, Welding, and Electronic Assembly.

2. CASAS Curriculum Index and Matrix

To link the assessment procedures with competency-based curriculum, the Matrix was developed which identifies instructional materials that target instruction in specific competency statements and specifies the appropriate program and level of instruction. All materials are adult oriented in content and meet curriculum standards established by the CASAS Consortium. Currently 102 publications are included in the Matrix and it is updated on a yearly basis.

3. CASAS Item Bank

CASAS has created an item bank of more than 2000 test items that have been developed, field tested, and calibrated to measure life skill competency statements along a continuum of difficulty. Each

item is coded to specify the content, competency area, competency statement, and task being measured. The scaling procedure built into the item bank permits testing not only on specific competencies, but also on a continuum of difficulty from beginning through advanced levels of ABE and ESL programs. Agencies can select items that measure their identified competencies at each program level but are able to monitor group progress across program levels because of the underlying common scaling procedure.

Tests currently developed using the CASAS Item Bank CASAS Life Skills Survey Achievement Tests, Levels A, B, C Reading and Listening Tests. Alternate forms for each level. CASAS Machine Shop Reading and Listening Tests. One Level only. CASAS Locator Test - to locate students into the correct test level. Locally developed Placement and Level Exit Tests.

4. Implementation Workshops

To assist agencies with the design and implementation of an assessment system for competency-based program training workshops are available for agency staff which address Planning,

Item Writing, Test Construction, Uses of Data for Evaluation, Applied Performance Measures, and Classroom Use of Assessment. Also 13 agencies serve as CASAS Demonstration Sites to provide assistance to other agencies planning for implementation of a competency-based assessment system.

National Validation

CASAS has been validated by the Joint Dissemination Review Panel (JDRP) and is approved as an exemplary program for national dissemination through the National Diffusion Network. It assists agencies to implement a competency-based instructional program and significant gains in student retention are experienced by agencies implementing CASAS. It is transportable to and replicable in a wide variety of educational settings. It has been implemented in more than 60 agencies in California, including local adult education agencies, community colleges, correctional institutions, community based organizations, and by adult education programs in Maryland. The size and setting of programs varied from large, urban schools to small, rural schools.

CASAS was designed to impact at the institutional level, making possible articulation among program levels and establishing a uniform method for reporting progress. The long-term effects of widespread CASAS implementation is increased accountability of programs and meaningful reporting of progress at local, state, and national levels.

For additional information, please contact:

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